The Negro Press

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'White People In America Are Entirely Unaware...'

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Gunnar Myrdal concludes his chapter on "The Negro Press" in **An American Dilemma** with the statement that, "It (the Negro newspaper) has rightly been characterized as 'the greatest single power in the Negro race.'" Beginning his discussion, Dr. Myrdal had observed:

Most white people in America are entirely unaware of the bitter and relentless criticism of themselves; of their policies; their business enterprises; their churches, schools, and other institutions; their social customs, their opinions and prejudices; almost everything else in white American civilization. Week in and week out these are presented to the Negro people in their own press. It is a fighting press. (p. 908)

The pleading and advocacy of the Negro newspaper has been for first class citizenship. Its criticism has been directed against exclusion from the mainstream of American life and against all persons, institutions, and circumstances that obstructed the Negro's enjoyment of those rights and privileges considered to be the due of an American.

Those critics of the Negro newspaper who find its offerings to be inflammatory and sensational, have not been able to make accusations of unAmericanism against the publications. The editorial philosophy of the Negro newspaper has not been one of criticism of our institutions as such, but an "include me in"—a "Me, too" philosophy. Whatever America offers, whether noble, cheap, indifferent or tawdry, clamor is raised in the Negro newspaper to "let us in on it." So, the Negro press in the country has not been an opposition press; it has no alternative to offer for our established ways and practices. Its primary concern has been the Negro's "Cause" and that cause, throughout the history of the nation, has been complete assimilation of the Negro in American society.

—The Reporter

The First Paper

The first paper published by Negroes of which there is record was *Freedom's Journal* which appeared in 1827 edited by Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm. Of twenty-four periodicals published by Negroes before the Civil War the most famous was Frederick Douglass' *North Star* which later became simply *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Understandably, the papers in this period were published in the North and devoted to development of anti-slavery sentiment. The first Negro paper started in the South was the *Colored American* which appeared, for a few months in 1865, in Augusta, Georgia. Perhaps the most militant editor before World War I was William Monroe Trotter whose *Boston Guardian* appeared in 1901 with an "Equal Rights" platform.

Today, the most outspoken papers with the widest influence are still published in the North. Those that are considered "national weeklies" — *The Pittsburgh Courier, The Chicago Defender,* and the *Baltimore Afro-American* circulate widely in the South and serve to mobilize opinion about issues of concern to Negroes generally as well as to publicize local issues in editions designed especially for southern areas.

The second grouping of Negro papers may be those of regional influence. In this grouping may be placed the *Kansas City Call,* the *Norfolk Journal and Guide, The Atlanta World* and affiliates, and *The Houston Informer* chain. All of these papers have reporting and circulation coverage over several states.

—The Reporter

In a third grouping may be placed those papers that are essentially local in news coverage and circulation. Local as used here may mean not only a single city but more often a considerable portion of the state in which the paper is published.

Reporting and presentation of news in the Negro newspaper follows the traditions of the sensational American press rather than that of the conservative press. Negroes are kept informed about happenings in the Negro world that are not reported elsewhere. "Our side" of the story is told in the Negro paper and this side frequently fails to agree with the description of the same incident in the daily papers. Where the Negro paper has been aggressive in moulding a public opinion among Negroes against the enemies of the Negro's cause, pressure and even violence have been used to silence the paper.

Depend on Circulation

Until recently, advertisers have not recognized the Negro paper as a useful medium for reaching the Negro market. These still depend largely upon revenue from circulation despite the fact that value of their columns for advertising is now well established.

The crusading Negro press has hardly fared differently from any crusader who in promoting his cause disturbs those who are satisfied with things as they are.

'It Is My Position That Prejudice and Hate Cannot Stand the Light of Day'

BY ROSCOE DUNJEE
(Editor, The Black Dispatch)

Personally, in all of our public addresses in this section we have attacked all of the sectional taboos, and we have also done so continuously for thirty four years in our editorial column. I have said more times than I have fingers and toes to white audiences that I believe in social equality. I am against the mob, segregation, disfranchisement and every form of demoted citizenship status. No one in the radius of my circulation misunderstands me on these questions, and despite the fact I say these things I have been more sought for by white audiences than any other Negro in Oklahoma. The individual who introduces me most invariably says "Mr. Dunjee is the type of Negro classed by many as radical, but he regards the spirit in his approach to controversal subjects in such a way as not to offend."

Residential Segregation

A most grievous fight I have had with the local community has developed with the question of residential segregation. For twenty-five years I have spearheaded this fight in Oklahoma City. In fact I financed the Sidney Hawkins Habeas Corpus Court Action which ended in an opinion rendered by our State Supreme Court outlawing the right of any unit of the state to enact racial zoning statutes. It was in this case that I took the stand as an expert witness and stayed on the stand five hours, during which time the city attorneys tried to prejudice the court by questioning me about irrelevant matters, such as my views about inter-marriage, disfranchisement, separate schools and what-not.

That is one instance in my public career when I discovered the spirit of the Negro is not up to the level of white liberalism, for when I took my gloves off and put in the record my thinking on this subject, and the newspapers proceeded to run lurid headlines telling what I was saying on the stand, my Negro friends assured me of hurting the cause of liberalism and good race relations. We however won that case, outlawing in a southern state court residential segregation.

You have no idea what this sort of fighting has done to me in a financial way. Many merchants in this city have banded themselves together with the understanding they will not advertise in a paper that preaches marriage of whites and blacks and who spear-heads encroachment of the blacks in white neighborhoods.

The most acute and savage attack that was ever made upon our publication came some ten years ago when

ROSCOE DUNJEE

we launched a fight on the Oklahoma City School Board. Most of the members were later landed in the penitentiary. *The Black Dispatch* spearheaded that fight even before the white daily in this city realized what was going on. At that time oil had made many school properties rich with the big wells gushing right in the city limits and we had a racketeering group who were not only enriching themselves out of these lush opportunities, but in addition were peddling jobs to at least fifty per cent of the Negro teachers, many of whom had to suffer many indignities, and offer to put their virtue on the block to hold a job.

Jail For School Board

This sort of thing had been going on for perhaps seven or eight years before it broke in the open, but we made the discovery that almost every prominent person in our section had to keep his mouth shut because for one reason or another he had been drawn into the racket. His wife, his sister or his friend had bought a job. One of the school board members was a member of the retail merchant's association, and he personally got out and did a job among the merchants that almost put us out of business, but we stuck by our guns to the end. Whites entered the fight only to discover that jobs were being peddled to white teachers also.

One particular man, who sought revenge, at least once each month for more than a year, would get drunk and call me up, using the vilest and most profane language conceivable. Following spending a term in the penitentiary he died. At least six of the school board were finally landed behind prison bars.

Gratifying Response

The most gratifying response to my editorial policies have come from young white people. Early I discovered that not only older white people, but older blacks were cast in the mould of slavery and that there is not much one can do about it. I have centered my attack on the problem among young white people, through addresses in churches, colleges and every interracial gathering and through identifying myself with all youth organizations.

When the American Legion and the political boys in Oklahoma decided to get rid of the Oklahoma Youth Legislature, composed of whites, Indians and Negroes, and when a number of the adult white sponsors got cold feet and ran away, I personally for almost two years financially supported the organization with printed matter and many times cash. The most inspirational moments gleaned from this effort came when I observed white and black youth sitting down in my office preparing copy for a newspaper "Youth Frontiers" which I published for these young people for two years.

I often feel that the strong wave of liberalism existing among white youths in Oklahoma was generated in the atmosphere the *Black Dispatch* has helped to create during the past 34 years in making frontal attack upon prejudice of every character and form. It is my position that prejudice and race hate cannot stand the light of day.

'All Victories Have To Be Paid For'

BY L. C. BATES

(Editor, The State Press)

Two months after its birth, the *State Press* called editorially for the abatement of a wave of Negro cuttings, stabbings, homicides, and other crimes through the "appointment of colored policemen." (July 4, 1941.)

Then Sergeant Thomas P. Foster, a young Negro non-com, was, as he lay helpless on the street, shot to death ruthlessly by a white patrolman. The State Press went to the street headlining the atrocity of the gun-happy partolman and his victim, "BODY RIDDLED WHILE LYING ON THE GROUND; WHITE MILITARY POLICE LOOK ON, BRANDISHING GUNS TO HOLD CROWD BACK."

The killing was whitewashed, but out of it was born under the prodding of the *State Press*, appointment of Negro military policemen at Camp Robinson, and also Negro city police to patrol the Negro business section.

A certain amount of security was thus won for the Negro citizen. But all victories have to be paid for. Sergeant Foster paid with blood. The State Press paid with money. Several leading stores took their ads from the columns of the State Press because of its "denunciations."

One of the Little Rock unions which has a large number of Negro members staged a strike.

Negro picketers walked the line in Little Rock. But oddly enough, no clash between white men and Negroes occurred. More oddly still, and almost as though it had been engineered by those with much to gain, a clash occurred among Negroes. A Negro strikebreaker stabbed and killed a Negro picketer who was armed only with a stick.

The Grand Jury, operating behind closed doors, refused to admit a representative of the *State Press* and promptly exonerated the knife wielder and killer. There followed an indictment of Negro strikers on picket duty at the time of the killing on charges of infringement of an Arkansas so-called "Anti-Violence" Act. In a trial presenting aspects of prejudice and passion against Negro unionists and preferment for their opponents, the Negro picketers were tried, convicted, and sentenced to the penitentiary.

In a bold headline extending across the top of the front page, the *State Press* summed up its view of the trial, "FTA STRIKERS SENTENCED TO PEN BY A HAND-PICKED JURY—STATE ANTI VIOLENCE LAW USED TO INTIMIDATE NEGRO LABOR—BELIEVED BY MANY FAMILIAR WITH PROSECUTION."

L. C. BATES

If there is any doubt that race-baiters read race papers, let it be remembered that a short time after the headline appeared, deputies from the Sheriff's office descended upon the State Press office early one morning and calling for Mr. Bates, informed him that he was under arrest, and read to him a document charging him with contempt of court. The officers then proceeded to his house where they also arrested Mrs. Bates on a charge identical with that against her husband.

At the trial, the judge, violently pressing the charge of contempt of court and disregarding all representations of the defense, fined Mr. Bates and his wife $100.00 each and sentenced them each to ten days in the county jail. He denied an appeal and instructed that penalties be immediately enforced.

Later the State Supreme Court promptly exonerated and freed the Bateses. Freedom of the Press in the State of Arkansas had been fought for, suffered for, paid for, and won by the Negro editor of a Negro weekly.

'The Word Came Down To Destroy This Negro...'

BY LARKIN MARSHALL

(Editor, The Macon World)

The *Macon World* was the only Negro paper in Georgia to come out for the ideals of the Progressive Party. In May 1948 the editor of the *World* was nominated by the Progressive State convention as their candidate for Senator. This brought a storm of protest, from friend and foe. Friends, because they believed that he would be utterly destroyed because of his political convictions and foes, because they desired to discourage Negroes from seeking major political office. At the Democratic Primary Editor Marshall was challenged and not allowed to vote. This did more to dampen the ardor of the faint-hearted than any single incident. They were made to believe that if they voted Progressive they would not be permitted to vote in any city election.

Mustered Vote

Under the leadership of Editor Marshall the Negro vote had elected all of Mayor Lewis B. Wilson Aldermanic slate and given to the city one of its best mayors. This same editor and his paper had been able to see to it that even the sheriff carried a majority of the Negro vote.

His untiring efforts caused Governor Talmadge to fail to carry Bibb County. After the election in 1948 word went down the line to destroy this Negro who had essayed to run for the Senate. The attitude of many white leaders, even those who were classed as liberal, underwent a distinct change. They felt that Editor Marshall had disobeyed the 11th commandment by attacking Jim Crow and segregation in its own grounds.

Cross Was Burned

His ringing editorials demanding Civil Rights for his people created such a wave of resentment that a cross was burned on the lawn of his home in Marshall Heights, a subdivision named for him because of his fight for decent homes for Negroes. (And although 12 beautiful homes have been built and occupied by their happy owners, the fight still goes on to destroy it and take it away.)

In order to destroy the editor of the *World* a Negro preacher was persuaded to bring a libel suit agains the *World* editor and an all-white jury returned a verdict in 20 minutes.

The *World* has been temporarily suspended but plans are being made to resume publication at an early date.